



School of Architecture, Building & Design (SABD)

Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Architecture

**[ARC2224] Theories of Architecture & Urbanism**

## **Theorizing Architecture**

**(Part 2 | Analysis Diagrams & Essay)**

Site | Central Klang

Building | Kuan Yin Temple

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction of Klang

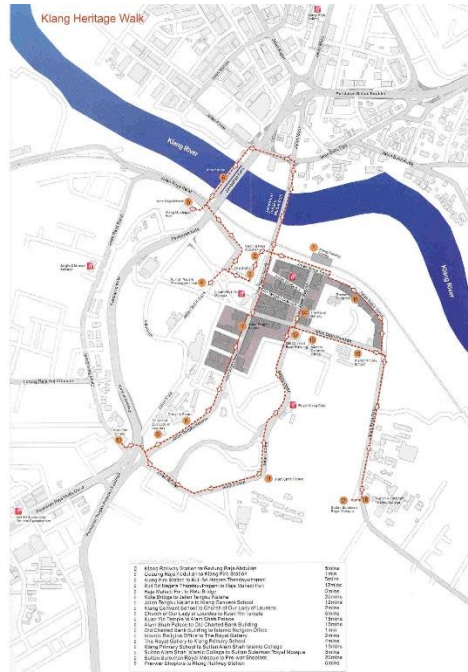


Figure 1: The map of Klang Central. The red dots signify the landmarked buildings in Klang.

Klang has a history which stretches back for at least two thousand years. Approximately 600 years ago, Klang was written starting from the age of Majapahit's Government. It was never occupied by a foreign power. The Local Klang Authority, so called MPK building has become an important wall of defense to stop the enemies from getting further when the war was triggered. Another important feature to be highlighted in Klang will be River Klang. It has been a source of tin of high quality since ancient times. Malay rulers and chiefs have lived near the mouths of great rivers, so that they could control the expert of forest, tin and gold. None of the place in this peninsula at a river mouth has gone through such a long period of eventful existence as Klang. Nowadays, although there isn't any prominent event carries out at the river anymore, it is still a

significant feature and historical landmarks to identify Klang (Figure 1). However, today, many major developments are taking place in Klang thus changing further its current condition in term of urban layout and architecture; whilst the historical buildings and landmarks are well preserved to keep mark of the identity, history, culture and economy status of the community.

The urban development of Klang is correlated with the study of the connection between public history and people lives and livelihoods to urban landscape through architectural preservation as it changes over time. The historical site – Klang is fostered with both place and social memories that capture the connection between the local community and built and natural environment that are intertwined in its cultural landscape. These memories always triggered based on the understanding of the shared pasts and histories of the respective ethnic groups (Chinese, Indian and Malay), the workers (insiders) as well as oral histories in Klang. Through architectural preservation of the Chinese and Indian temples as well as mosque in Klang, it helps to assert visual presence of those spaces in this city that triggers place memory to the community. In the study of *The Power of Place* by Hayden, she outlines the effort to integrate the preservation of vernacular buildings with local economic, social and cultural development, meantime preserve the community's neighbourhoods without gentrification. Hence, preservation of the historical buildings in Klang should remain all that remained from the original buildings in order to leave the remaining elements visible to visitors and the new generations with their own imagination.

## 1.2 History of Kuan Yin Temple



*Figure 2: Kuan Yin Temple, as known as Kwan Imm Ting.*

Kuan Yin Temple, as known as the Kwan Imm Ting (观音亭) is one of the oldest Chinese temples in Malaysia dedicated to Kwan Imm or the Goddess of Mercy. It was founded and built in 1892, originally sited of the current Sultan Abdual Samad building to serve as a government district office for British administration. Due to the high population of Chinese Hokkiens in Klang, the temple was built to accommodate and serve their praying and spiritual rituals. It also marks an important evidence of Chinese immigrant's presence and contribution to the development of Klang.

In the 70's, a flyover of Simpang Lima roundabout was proposed to be built next to Kwan Imm Ting, thus causing two rooms of the temple were demolished to give way for the construction. Dated back in 2001, the worship area of the temple was closed due to the state of the temple was beyond repair and the temple committee came into decision to demolish the temple. Initially, a three-storey structure was proposed for the replacement if the plans of the temple were approved for its demolition. However, the committee of the temple was finally persuaded to

retain the existing temple and suggestion was given to modify their plans for expansion instead. This was done through public intervention and an edict from DYMM Sultan Selangor.

The design architect, Poh Kwang Chartered Architect, has since offered an alternative to envisage a new-built structure in the position of the 1950's two-storey structure and partial retention of the original temple. This proposal had been approved by both the temple committee and the Local Authority. After the order to preserve the original temple building was given by the Majlis Perbandaran Klang (MPK), the temple committee approached Badan Warisan Malaysia to advice on aspects of its retention and subsequently appointed to prepare a conservation plan for the original main temple with its central prayer hall and two side wings (Figure 3). The right side wings have since been demolished to accommodate the plans for the new temple prayer hall (Figure 4).



*Figure 4: The renovated old main temple hall.*



*Figure 3: The new temple hall.*

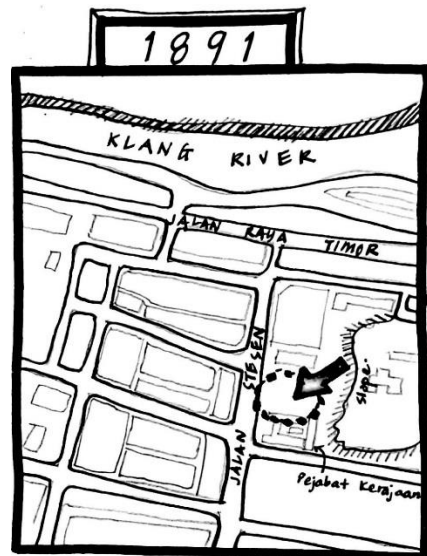
The inherent heritage values of Kwan Imm Ting is clearly demonstrated as it was the single Chinese temple personally identified by DYMM Sultan Selangor to be featured in “Landmarks of Selangor”, a publication which traces the evolution of the State of Selangor through its buildings and architecture. In the foreword of the book, His Royal Highness says “My intention in publishing this book is not merely to ensure that our state’s landmark buildings are identified and recorded

for future generations, but most importantly to make us all aware of the role buildings play in our lives.”

## **2.0 External Contributing Factors**

### **2.1 Political Changes**

Kwan Imm Ting has gone through a very important political changes dated back from 1891 to 1910. It is also the historical period to celebrate the turning of the temple from a mere draft into a real building where the society gets enjoy. Before the existence of Kwan Imm Ting, the land used to be owned by W.E. Maxwell, Senior District Officer in Klang. However, under the section 7 of the Land Code, 1891, the resident proposed to reserve permanently from the sale as a site for Chinese temple that portion of the land is situated in the Town of Klang, commencing a point on the east side of Station Street at its junction with Kling Street, linked for a proposed road (Figure 5 ).



*Figure 5: The site plan of Kwan Imm Ting was proposed to be sited.*

This proposal made by the resident was to have a Chinese temple and a petition that represents all Chinese community in Klang. Dated on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1891, District Officer Klang, H.W. Thomson then sent a memo to the Government Secretary, to the Resident, Selangor, in referring to the surrender of the Chinese temple site. The plan of the site is allocated at the place marked red in Figure , noted that the District Officer's house which was located at the top centre of the plan (Figure 6). However, the main road system which exists through to the present day is already established and marked on this plan. On the other side, the temple is sited on a North-East to South-West axis. It sits on level ground with a slope at the rear. It faces a main thoroughfare in front whereas the rear boundary is wider than the front and the right boundary is at a right angle to the road (Figure 7). It was obviously an auspicious site chosen for its good Feng Shui.



Figure 6: The given site for Kwan Imm Ting was influenced by the placement of the District Officer's

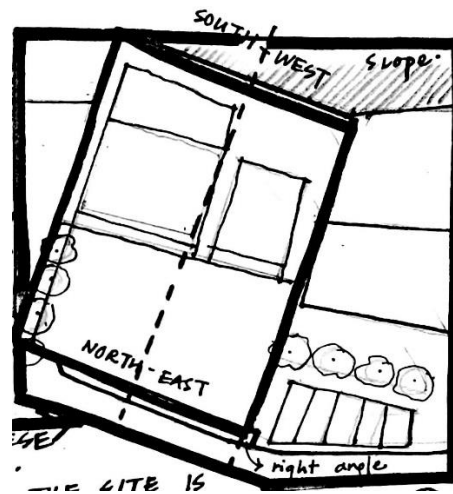


Figure 7: The orientation of the temple according to Feng Shui.



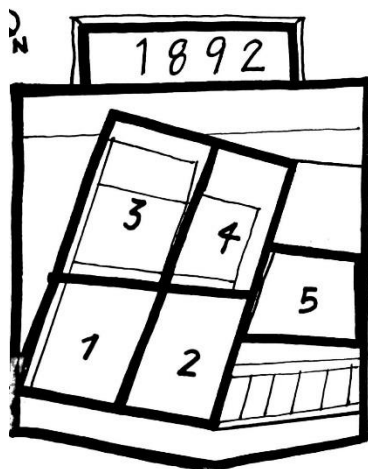


Figure 8: Five lots of land were requested initially in 1892.



Figure 9: The lots were reduced to four and a kitchen was built

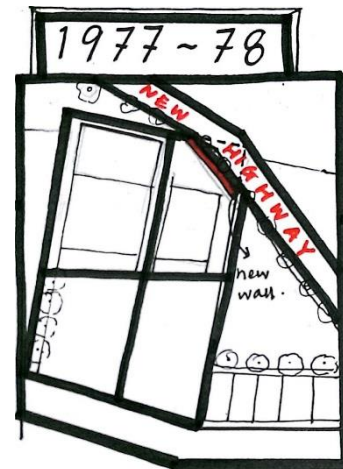
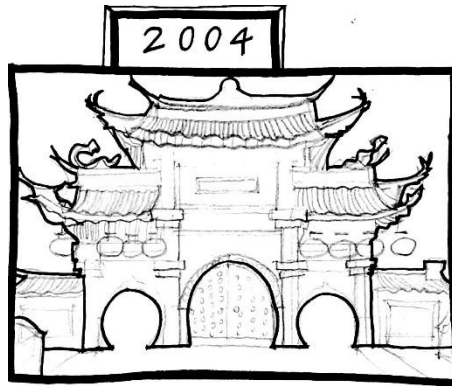


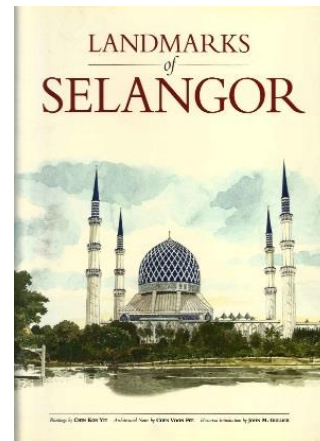
Figure 10: The rear corner was acquired for the construction of new highway, and a wall was built.

Five lots of land were requested initially regarding a petition to represent Chinese businesses and community, attested that the temple has been built. This additional land was thereafter been appealed to make provision for future expansion of the temple (Figure 8). Kwan Imm Ting was successfully built and ready to serve in 1892. Subsequently on August 1893, the requested lots had been reduced to four. At the period of time, only one lot was used. In the year of 1918, all four lots were finally been used. A kitchen was built and located at the right of the complex, close to the site where there is a well (Figure 9). Succeeding with the year from 1977 to 1978, some changes were made again. The rear corner of the Temple Reserve was acquired by the State for the purpose of the construction of a new highway, therefore a new wall had to be built (Figure10). In the year of 2002, the temple was found beyond repair condition. They discovered that the main timbers of the buildings were infested by termites. Therefore, Temple Trustees decided to vacate and demolish the structure and rebuild a whole new Kwan Imm Ting. The temple was then demolished after being approved by the Klang Municipal Council (MPK) in 2002. The temple took two years to be rebuilt. Finally, Kwan Imm Ting was up and ready to serve the society once again in the year of 2004 (Figure11). The Goddess of Mercy and the other deities

were relocated to the Stage after the renovation was done. Upon the final completion of the new-look Kwan Imm Ting, it was then personally identified by DYMM Sultan Selangor to feature in “Landmarks of Selangor” (Figure 12), a publication which traces the evolution of Selangor through its architecture and building. (Badan Warisan Malaysia [BWM], 2005)



*Figure 11: The temple was rebuilt after the termite attack was discovered.*



*Figure 12: Kwan Imm Temple is identified by DYMM Sultan Selangor to feature in this publication.*

## **2.2 Cultural Significance**

Kwan Imm Ting is manifested as one of the oldest temples in Klang that serves most of the Chinese community. In Buddhism, people believe that Kwan Imm, The Goddess of Mercy is the one who has attained Nirvana but has chosen to remain on earth to save lost souls. (Chin, Chen, & Gullick, 2003). Today, Kwan Imm Ting still carries weight to serve the Chinese community in Klang who are still practices the traditional worshipping of the Goddess of Mercy.

Cultural significance is rooted in Kwan Imm Ting after its renovation in 2004. Both European and Chinese cultures have influenced the architectural, artistic, historical and social

values of the temple. The idea of “Critical Regionalism” is seen behind the architecture of the temple. Kenneth Frampton, one of the theorists who wrote the topics of Critical Regionalism in 1983, addressed the architectural issue of “placelessness”, lack of identity on the international style and rejects ornamentation of Postmodern Architecture. He strongly suggests the manifesto of the identity cultural heritage, the traditional construction method and everyday life patterns that emphasizes the connection between people and space, noted that the “modern tradition” is to tie to geographical and cultural context and not to vernacular architecture.



*Figure 13: The Western motif of semi-circular pediment.*



*Figure 14: The Eastern traditional Chinese motif of semi-circular pediment.*

Kwan Imm Ting has portrayed this cultural significance where unique semi-circular pediments are found on two end bays of the front elevation of the temple. The semi-circular pediments incorporates one with European and the other with Chinese architectural elements, which are not usually seen in other temples of this type. The bas-relief on the semi-circular pediment at the Gable Wall on the left courtyard wing shows a Western-style motif of a lion and a tiger holding a globe underscored with a ribbon (Figure 13). In contrast, the motif on the semi-circular pediment on the right courtyard wing features a more traditional scene of three Chinese lions playing, which represents the Eastern (Figure 14). The combination of the local and global languages of architecture that suggested in Critical Regionalism has proven in evidence of the

semi-circular pediments in Kwan Imm Ting. The other featured elements are the mixed-culture rectangular windows found under the façade of the semi-circular pediments. The motif of the bamboo intertwined with a floral vine are found incorporating with rectangular frame of motif walls (Figure 15). These inter-cultural influenced windows are unusual and they reflect European style in Chinese temple architecture: the symmetrical pattern which are not commonly employed in Chinese motif, incorporated with Chinese traditional carvings within.



*Figure 15: Inter-cultural rectangular windows of traditional Chinese motif and European symmetrical patterns*

Apart of the combination of the local and global languages in the temple architecture, this temple also provides an architecture rooted in modern tradition, but tied to geographical and cultural context. The very prominent and significant elements featured on Kwan Imm Ting are inevitably the implementation of the motifs of local fruits on the roof ridge (Figure 16 & 17). The interesting use of durian and pineapple as decorative motifs on the roof ridge of the Main Entrance Pavilion reflects the adaptation of the temple to the local environment, noted that the fruits signify the local fruit production industry. This feature is so unique that none of the temples in China or Malaysia has found to implement this kind of decorative motifs. Other than fruits, there are also motifs like detailed curved grass are found on the roof ridges (Figure 18). After all, the incorporation of the local motifs with the traditional Chinese roof ridge motifs employs the idea behind Critical Regionalism suggested the combination of the universal civilization and world

culture into signifying the contemporary beliefs, without a total gentrification of the tradition and culture.



*Figure 16: Durian motif is found on the roof ridge.*



*Figure 17: Pineapple motif is found on the roof ridge.*



*Figure 18: Curved grass motif found on the roof ridge.*

However, the vernacular details and ornaments which kept throughout the temple are against to reject the ornamentation of Postmodern Architecture discussed in Critical Regionalism. Though the implementation of the local settings and the combination of both local and global languages celebrate the amalgamation of universal civilization with the world culture, the temple was still rebuilt in a vernacular style of Chinese temple across the centuries. This aspect has always been linked to the protection and preservation of the traditions and cultural beliefs instilled in the community.

### **2.3      *Phenomenological Architectural Design***

Phenomenology, in general, is the interpretive study of human experience which aim to examine human situations, events, meanings and experiences. Through exploring the phenomenological investigation of how the community experiences the spaces of Kwan Imm Ting with an intimate scale, where any object, event, situation or experience that the people can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, feel, intuit, know, understand or live through. (David Seamon, 2000) In other words, Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that a phenomenological study draws attention to specific phenomenon and point toward more general qualities and characteristics that accurately describe the essential nature of the phenomenon as it has presence and meaning in the concrete lives and experiences of the community (human beings). In experiencing Kwan Imm Ting, phenomenology of material, of color, of architecture and of space that the community live through will be examined.

One insightful study relating to material and detailing aspects is a “phenomenology from within” - a near “phenomenology”, where architectural “close-ups” are given emphasis. In this sense of exploring Kwan Imm Ting, a “sensory architecture” is to be rooted through the intimate scale of human’s experience with the detailed materials within. Kwan Imm Ting is based on a Chinese paradigm temple courtyard configuration in the Minnan style of Southern Fujian. (Badan Warisan Malaysia [BWM], 2005) The use of materials brick and timber in the construction is uniquely Southern Chinese. Thus, it requires the presence of Chinese masons, carpenters, craftsmen, artists and materials, all imported from China. Detailing emphasis on the massive beams and columns in the temple are often brightly painted and treated as part of the temple ornamentation as the testimony to the carpentry skills of the master builders, which timber structure are objects of admiration (Figure 19 & 20). Very detailed ornamentation has become



the ornamental themes in the temple, and the ornaments often concentrate on subject matters of novels and plays, animal and floral motifs, instead of pure religious themes. It shows the priority of the tectonic over the scenography has given to manifest the idea of visual versus tactile. These cultural symbols convey meanings at minimal space to the people and the memories and cultural pasts have shared through the experience of the existential spaces in the temple. The detailed materiality emphasis implemented in Kwan Imm Ting always evokes the memories of the shared beliefs and culture within the ethnic community in the temple.



*Figure 19: The brightly painted beam with detailed carvings treated.*



*Figure 20: The details of the massive columns evokes the sense of tactile in experience.*

For instance, the motifs of temple resembles the shape of waves, referred to as car crawling and the swallow and fish tails. The triple ridges are decorated with sinuous dragons (Figure 21) representing strength, justice and power. Moreover, the dark red burner and the entrance court have tiles with beautiful phoenix (Figure 22 & 23), the Emperor of all birds, symbolic of beauty and good fortune, which appears singly and only in peace period. (Chin, Chen, & Gullick, 2003) In short, ornamental symbolism of the ethnic's beliefs that every aspect of life is

related closely to nature through the use of detailed materials in Kwan Imm Ting plays an important role in the conveyance of meaning, beliefs, culture and existential memories in placement. Besides, the use of bright colours such as red, orange, yellow and gold in the ornamentations has become a characteristic of the Chinese temple in which these colours represent the ethnic rite. In terms of the material sense of the elements – whether it is soft or hard, coarse or fine, warm or cold, and so forth, denotes an intricate set of tensions between architectural elements and the experience of the community.



*Figure 21: The sinuous dragon can be found largely on the roof ridges.*



*Figure 22: The red dark burner tiles with phoenix motif.*



*Figure 23: The phoenix motif that printed on tiles*



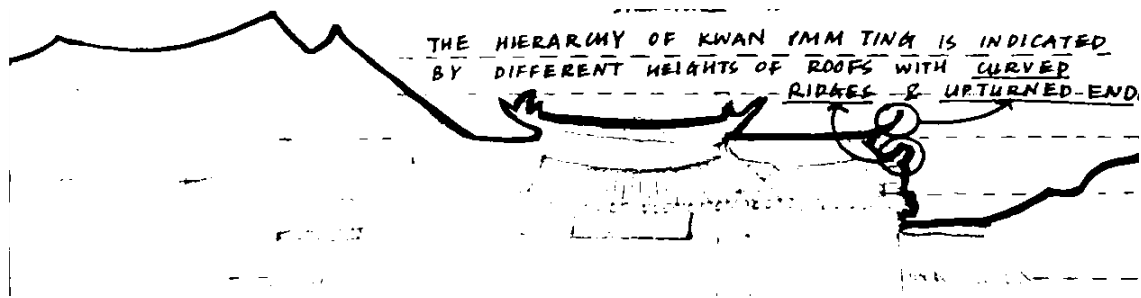


Figure 24: The sectional roof profile of Kwan Imm Ting that draws the hierarchy with the height of roofs with their curved ridges and upturned ends.

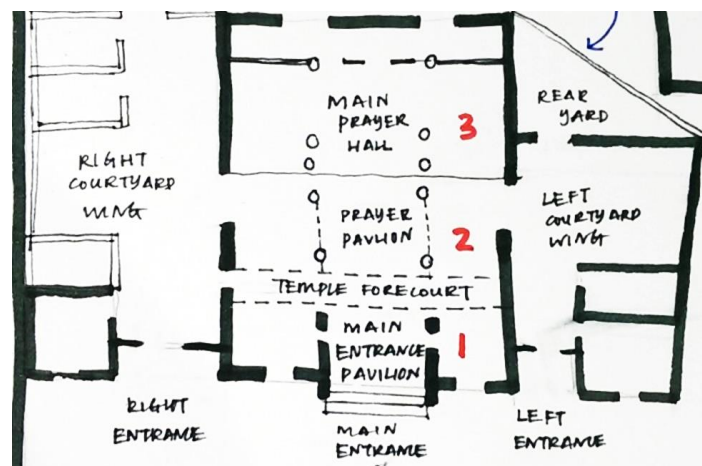


Figure 25: The spatial layout that leads the users in experiencing the temple through different senses.

In terms of architecture, several design strategies have been examined in investigating the phenomenology of space in Kwan Imm Ting. The hierarchy of Kwan Imm Ting is indicated externally by the different heights of roofs with their curved ridges and upturned ends (Figure 24). On each side of the axis, accessed via external side doors, are smaller halls and other function rooms separated by side courts from the central prayer halls. It has an open courtyard with the outsized incense burner to the left and symmetrical laid out along a central axis. (Badan Warisan Malaysia [BWM], 2005) The front pavilion is an open sided structure which provide protection from the elements when prayers are being offered to the god. The first hall serves as a reception

area, leading to the courtyard or as entrance hall, before the main altar hall is approached (Figure 25). The effect of the elongated structure is to lead the worshipper ever deeper into the sanctuary until the most venerated shrine of the structure is reached. Lesser deities are placed in the side wings or in a hall further behind. These relate the sense of heaviness and lightness of the elements placed in the temple in relation to the beliefs and tradition practiced by the community. The semi-enclosed prayer pavilion is the traditional space between the material world and the spiritual while the open air courtyards provide the nature elements and tranquility (Figure 26). For instance, there is a water feature located at the open air courtyard, with a statue of The Goddess of Mercy complimented in the centre. The motion of the water flowing element with the phenomena of living features swim freely within, triggers the sense of dynamism or inertia, tranquility and the serenity through the experience of the sense of ears into an existential experience. The most enclosed prayer hall filled with objects of veneration and the scent of incense and lighted joss sticks, imparts an aura of mystique (Figure 27). A different kind of sense is evoked when the people is experiencing within this space of smell. The sense of aroma arouses and directs the subconscious memories of the cultural practices shared among the community across the decades, where the shared pasts and histories are then bringing in the physical attachment of the community in giving in intimate experiences in the temple.



*Figure 26: Natural elements in open air courtyard.*



*Figure 27: The most enclosed prayer hall filled with objects of veneration*

Through incorporating Pallasmaa's interpretations of "phenomenology" into the studies on architectural designs of Kwan Imm Ting, however, it draws certain weakness and ambiguity within the discussions. The first of which is rooted in the idea of excessive concentration on the "nearness", staying mostly "within" and presenting "close-ups" in experiencing the work and details of architecture that neglects the experience of architecture in a macro-level of the temple. Thereby, there comes the phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Schulz's to criticize Pallasmaa's terminology as the "fragile phenomenology", pointing out the weakness of not consider the genius loci of the architectural work. "...it immediately enters the realm of the building and its immediate surroundings, interpreting only the building in detail." (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) The second weakness in relation of the implementation of Pallasmaa's fragile phenomenology into Kwan Imm Ting is that, most of the analyses and examinations are partial selections and highlights only particular aspect of architectural experience within the temple. This explained when the senses experienced by the community in Kwan Imm Ting are discussed separately, of touch, of ear, of eye and of feeling, offering evidence only to prove the importance of the senses respectively. Although broad claims of "multi-sensory" interpretation have been presented across the analyses of Kwan Imm Ting in accordance to Pallasmaa's fragile phenomenology, however, detailed evidence is always absent to convince the claims proposed. This kind of interpretation has always lead to incomplete understanding of the temple's comprehensive architectural experience.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

In a nutshell, being one of the oldest and most historically rooted temples in Klang, Malaysia, Kwan Imm Ting is standing strong and attracting people from all around the country and of all ages. It has served the community for 121 years and still serving the faithful prayers till today. With its stunning architecture and its delicate handcrafted details, Kwan Imm Ting has also fascinated the local authorities and was granted the title of “Landmarks in Klang” and as a tourist attraction. All and all, the glamorous of Kwan Imm Ting would not exist based on its individuality of architecture, whereas, the external contributing factors like the political changes, cultural significance and the phenomenological architectural design have brought all perspective of responses to the temple and vice versa, in building the status and cultural heritage value of Kwan Imm Ting today. “Kwan Imm Ting has been serving for a century and we don’t plan on stopping anytime soon, in these current seven years, we can see that the temple is doing better each year, the prayers are increasing and donations are rising, which help us to expand our charity work to a larger scale. Adopting the spirit of the Goddess of Mercy, we hope to serve as long as we can, because we always believe that giving is caring.” said Mr. Goh, Senior Secretary of Kwan Imm Ting.

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